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FRANCE

The French government has decided to continue the Ariane space-launcher program.

On October 16, a government spokesman announced that France will continue to participate in the European space program in general and the Ariane project in particular. President Giscard apparently made the final decision himself, overriding the objections of his Finance Ministry. The announcement emphasized the importance of maintaining "European independence in space" and promised the "Europeanization" of French technology among the other nine countries participating in the program. The spokesman also assured that the launcher could be used by all the participating countries.

Development of the Ariane had been threatened by the delay of the French to allocate funds for the project. France controls the program because it has assumed responsibility for 62.5 percent of the estimated \$490-million development cost.

The Ariane launch vehicle, also known as the L3S, is intended to put satellites of up to 1,650 pounds into synchronous orbit. The French National Center for Space Studies estimated last year that the Ariane will launch its first satellite in 1979. The Ariane is designed to orbit communications, navigation, and military reconnaissance satellites.

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